

NEA-Alaska/Retired

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Travelin' Time

Just returned from a 15-day cruise around the Hawaiian Islands and a week in Depoe Bay, Oregon with my retired teacher friend from Florida. The cruise

started in San Francisco with four days at sea. The seas were a bit choppy until we were further away from the coast. One might wonder how you cope with those days at sea where you begin to understand how those early seafaring folks believed the earth was flat. There are so many activities offered every day that sometimes it is hard to choose. There were two Hawaiian "ambassadors" on board who taught

Hilo, Hawaii

many classes, including ukulele and hula lessons. I made a Hawaiian lei with eyelash yarn and a lava necklace and earrings. (The lava pieces were blessed so there should not be any unforeseen misfortunes.)

After four days at sea, we arrived in Hilo. Our tour took us through a lava tube, to a lava field, and to a fabulous chocolate shop. The next stop was Oahu where we visited the Arizona Memorial and the Mighty "Mo". I had been to the Memorial years ago, but the tour of the Missouri was new and very informative. There were photos of the signing of the formal surrender on September 2, 1945 which ended the Second World War. On to Kauai where we traveled to the Waimea Canyon Lookout and the fern grotto at Wailua State Park. I have numerous pictures of all the chickens that appear everywhere!! We took a two-hour history walking tour through Lahaina,

The Mighty "Mo"

Maui. The tour guide was excellent and extremely proud of her city. That was the only port where we had to use the tenders. Suffice it to say on that beautiful day, the ride was still a bit bumpy.

More super days at sea followed until we arrived at Ensenada. I chose to spend that day in the spa - well at least a few hours. And then our cruise neared the end as we made our way back to San Francisco. A short flight later we arrived in Portland and rented a car for the almost three-hour drive to Depoe Bay. Our accommodations at the timeshare afforded us a fabulous



Depoe Bay, Oregon

view of the ocean as the waves crashed on the rocky shore. We traveled north and south along highway 101 visiting little shops and scenic byways. The restaurants were quaint and served "fresh from the ocean" food.

All too soon the trip concluded and we were on our way home. Of course, we are already planning our next adventure!

— Barbara Stek

In This Issue

Travelin' Time.....	1
President's Message	2
Election News	3
Volunteers Needed	3
ARM Board - Spring 2018	4
Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board.....	4
Health Benefits Team Update.....	5
NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting - Jan. 10, 2018	5
Remembering Rod	6
Calendar of Events	6

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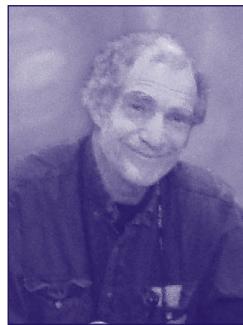
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This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed three times a year: October, February, and July. Retired members are encouraged to submit articles, as well as voice comments and concerns. Articles should be sent in Word via email to bwstekak@yahoo.com no later than the 1st of the publication month.

President's Message

aka Kronberg's Corner



For many years, NEA, AFT, their state and local affiliates, and many educators have stated publicly that public schools can overcome virtually all the problems created by dysfunctional or overwhelmed societal institutions and give even our most challenged students the tools they need to be productive members of society. If only public schools were provided the resources they need, educators could undo the negative impact of institutional racism, an economic system that has too few winners and far too many children growing up in the midst of poverty, with unhealthy diets,

suffering from the the impact of drugs, gangs, and street violence, and families where parents are too worried about where the rent and the next meal are coming from to provide much help or guidance for their children with homework or deal with problematic behaviors at school or anyplace else.

While public schools are often the most successful social institution children have in their lives, it is certainly not readily apparent to a significant percentage of the public that public schools can overcome the results of economic inequality, racial injustice, failed governmental policies, and the legacies of multiple generations who have experienced these conditions virtually all their lives. Even supporters of quality public education for every student must acknowledge that public schools are not a universal cure for the problems our students bring with them to their schools. *Public schools are rather the best mirror we have of the institutional successes or failures in the communities where they are located.*

Public schools are rather the best mirror we have of the institutional successes or failures in the communities where they are located.

Back in the 1960s, sociologist James Coleman conducted one of the largest studies of educational opportunity ever done. More than 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers were in the sample. The report itself, released by the US government in 1966 was entitled, "Equality of Educational Opportunity." The study was conducted and the report generated because the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required the Commissioner of Education to conduct a survey and report to the President and the Congress "concerning the lack of availability of educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions." It is widely referred to as the most important educational study ever conducted. We need to remember that this study predated the massive use of standardized testing. At that time, students were rarely tested using the same normed tests, there was little comparability in what they learned, and comparing student achievement measures in those days to the way student achievement is measured today would reveal a sea change in the number and type of assessments used then and now to judge student progress. The study also predated the integration of schools in much of the country. In fact, one of the prime reasons for the report was the frustration created by the continued segrega-

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"President's Message" Cont.

tion of students by race a decade after the Brown v. Board of Education decision by the US Supreme Court.

The Coleman Report was also very controversial because it reported that more than 2/3 of the difference in student performance was better correlated with the conditions of the students' family lives than with the quality of their schooling. In retrospect, the report's main failure was in failing to directly connect the economic conditions and racial discrimination that directly impacted what the researchers saw when they examined family behaviors with the disparities in student achievement they found when it came to providing equal educational opportunities. There has been a wealth of data collected in the more than half century since the issuance of the Coleman Report that has substantiated the notion that schools cannot undo all the negative impact of societal failure, and are most properly viewed as the best mirror we have to examine the quality of social institutions in our neighborhoods and communities. For those of us who have advocated for the necessary funding as well as the passage of state and local policies that would create and maintain high quality public schools, this realization means that we need to coalesce with groups fighting for safer streets, greater income equality, and stronger unions in both the private and public sectors, making serious attempts to address institutional racism, and working to ensure our governmental policies create the conditions for stronger families because those strong families are an absolutely necessary condition to reduce and/or eliminate the conditions that directly and indirectly create the learning and behavior problems that neighborhood public school educators, especially those working with the most challenged students, must face every single day.

— *Rich Kronberg*

Election News You Need to Know

Although we could not cast our ballots for NEA-Alaska President and Vice President...

- ✓ **Tim Parker is President.**
- ✓ **Segue Grant is the new VP.**

Now for our retired election results:

- ✓ **President: Rich Kronberg**
- ✓ **VP/Treasurer: Judy Salo**
- ✓ **Secretary: Barbara Stek**
- ✓ **Directors-at-large: Trena Richardson, Cindy Aillaud, and Roxanne Abajian**
- ✓ **Region R Director: Rich Kronberg**
- ✓ **Representative Assembly: Gayle Harbo and Roxanne Abajian**

The NEA-Alaska/Retired Board thanks you for taking the time to vote!

Volunteers Needed

Any member of NEA-Alaska/Retired who wishes to make a few contacts to recruit recently retired NEA-Alaska members or retired former members to join NEA-Alaska/Retired is encouraged to contact Rich Kronberg at richkronberg@gmail.com. We will provide a list of talking points as well as the contact information for the recently retired and soon to be retired individuals. The list of talking points has proven to be effective in recruiting members to join NEA-Alaska/

Retired at Delegate Assembly and other venues where we have had the opportunity to speak one on one with prospective members. The expectation is that interested individuals would be willing to make between 5 and 15 calls in this recruiting effort.

— *Rich Kronberg*



Alaska Retirement Management Board – Spring 2018



The ARM Board held meetings in Anchorage, December 6-8, 2017. The Actuarial and Audit Committees met on Wednesday morning.

KPMG, the external auditors for the retirement systems, reported a clean audit of the financial statements and complimented the staff of the

Departments of Administration and Revenue for their fine work and cooperation. Extra work has been required these past two years because of additional requirements of the Government Accounting Standards Board. The excellent internal auditing staff, under the direction of Ajay Desai, Director of Retirement and Benefits, will conduct 54 audits of PERS and TRS employers this fiscal year. In addition to making sure proper contributions are made, they also deal with common issues of temporary and rehired employees, especially rehired retirees.

A Conduent team of actuaries presented some alternative scenarios regarding two of the most important assumptions that the Board will consider in June as part of the current experience study. Lowering the interest rate assumption from the current 8% to something lower would increase the unfunded liability and increase the state contribution to the funds. Adopting a generational mortality table which will show increased longevity would have the same effect. These are just two of the many assumptions the committee must consider and work will continue with a

teleconference on February 12th.

A current financial report for the first 6 months of FY'18 shows the PERS and TRS Defined Benefit pension and health plans have a total of \$25.2 B and the PERS and TRS Direct Contribution plans have \$1.9 B. A total of \$32.6 B is managed by the Board and the change due to investment income the first 6 months was 6.8%. Steve Sikes, who manages the seven internal equity funds worth \$1.8 B, indicated that we will try to increase the money in these funds and continue to diversify. More staff may be needed if the invested amount increases significantly.

A report was given by the Division of Retirement and Benefits on the annual contribution to the Health Reimbursement Accounts of all DC members. Each year, since 2008, employers are required to contribute an amount equal to 3% of the average annual compensation of all PERS and TRS employees. In 2008 the amount was \$1531 and in FY'19, the 12th year, the contribution amount will be \$2103. There are currently 10 DC PERS retirees and 8 DC TRS retirees who have access to their HRA accounts.

The next meeting of the ARM Board will be in Juneau the end of March. There will be no April meeting this year. Adoption of the Experience Study, done once every 4 years, will take place at the June meeting in Anchorage.

– *Gayle Harbo*

Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board

The first meeting of the Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board was held in Juneau on February 7th. The purpose of the Board is to facilitate engagement and coordination between the State's retirement systems' members, the ARM Board, and the Commissioner regarding the administration of the retiree health plan.

Governor Walker appointed seven members to the Board. Among them are two NEA-Alaska/Retired members: Judy Salo, a retiree under both TRS and PERS, recommended by NEA-Alaska, and Gayle Harbo filling the seat designated for the ARM Board. One member and one staff person were on video conference from Anchorage while the majority were present in Juneau.

This initial meeting was largely informational. Members

attended the quarterly presentation from AETNA regarding the medical, dental, vision, and prescription drug plans under AlaskaCare. Commissioner of Administration, Leslie Ridle, Division Director, Ajay Desai, and members of the Health Team within the Department shared key facts, figures, and challenges that the Board will be addressing in future meetings.

The group elected Judy Salo as the Chairperson and Cammy Taylor as the Vice-Chair. A By-Laws Committee chaired by Dallas Hargraves was appointed. They will report back to the Board at the next meeting tentatively scheduled for May 9th.

– *Judy Salo*

Health Benefits Team Update

The AlaskaCare Retiree Health Plan appeal process has been updated as of January 1, 2018. There will be a formal level to the appeal process between the second level (third party administrator or independent review organization) and the Office of Administrative Hearings. This new third level appeal will be to the Division of Retirement and Benefits. The appeal brochures have been updated to reflect this change.

Information on changes will be added to the April edition of the HealthMatters newsletter and will also be posted soon on the AlaskaCare website. Level 2 appeal decision letters issued by the Third Party Administrators will contain information on the new Level 3 appeal process.

The Division has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PMB) to manage benefits for the 86,000 individuals covered in the AlaskaCare employee and retiree plans. The health plans spend an estimated \$241.3 million annually in combined pharmacy benefits. Two of the proposed benefits of the new plan will be maintaining significant discounts and improving customer service.

— Barbara Stek

Please make sure we have your current email address. Contact Tamara Monroe at 274-0536 to make changes.



NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting – January 10, 2018

The bulk of the meeting concerned preparation for Delegate Assembly: the Board seated delegates and over 100 first time DA delegates were registered. We organized responsibilities of Board members as chairs and co-chairs, and discussed Board committee resolutions and NBIs that will come to DA. Finally, we approved submitting an amendment to DA Standing Rules to specifically state that the Legislative Review Committee is to be composed of non-Board PACE members and other delegates on a proportional basis by region. The proportional basis is what gives that sub-committee of DA the ability to bring back a report on the year's legislative priorities which takes a 2/3 vote to amend.

The Board heard the report of the outside auditor. NEA- Alaska is in excellent financial condition and has a very healthy reserve as we confront the near certainty of some membership reduction due to the expected adverse decision by the US Supreme Court in the Janus case which would no longer permit locals to bargain for agency fee. Kudos were given to the stewardship of former Executive Director Lydia Garcia and former CFO Kaye Sullivan and to the current leadership of Glenn Bafia and K.T. Roope.

A highlight of the Retired caucus was the announcement of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board's establishment of the Gayle Harbo Award for outstanding service to NEA-Alaska/Retired members and our local. The late Rod McCoy was a most deserving first recipient.

As always, NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia was a dynamic presence and spent several days at DA. I had the opportunity to participate in a meeting between Lily and Alaska Commissioner of Education Michael Johnson, during which I saw first hand evidence of Alaska's good fortune in the positive synergy created by the mutual respect and friendship of the current Commissioner and our state president, based in part on a laser-like shared focus on the goal of providing an excellent public education for every Alaskan child.

In my career in Alaska, primarily because of the Association, I was involved in many efforts at educational reform. This time it feels refreshingly different, most particularly because of the quality of leadership we have at this moment. DA's unanimous adoption of the NBI supporting the Alaska Education Challenge gives NEA-Alaska President Tim Parker a powerful basis going forward to work with all the other stakeholders.

I found the State Board's Three Commitments to be simple but powerful statements: to increase student success, using multiple measures to identify success; to cultivate safety and well-being for students and staff, and most particularly the third, to support responsible and reflective learners. If every school employee, every parent, every legislator, and every community member across the state can articulate and embrace these commitments, I believe that there is a real chance to create genuine transformation of public schools in our state.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is a special moment in the history of Alaska's public policy on education and we have a real opportunity for significant and lasting change.

— Susan Stitham



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Look inside to see the recent election results!

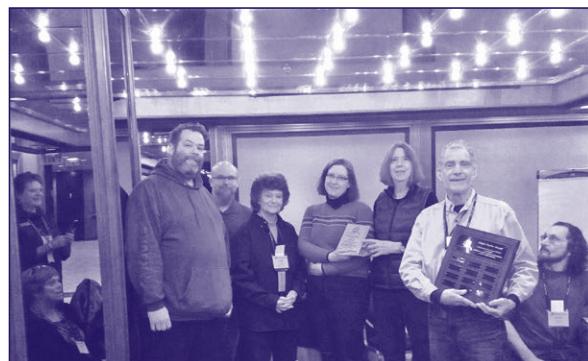
Remembering Rod

Last year, when Rod McCoy resigned from the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board and as chair of the Health Care Team due to health concerns, I chatted with him and asked what he would like to honor his years of service. He indicated that he would like a plaque. Our plan was to present this at Delegate Assembly in January. Alas, Rod passed away before this could happen, but we were lucky that his family was able to receive the award in his honor.

We were able to create the *Gayle Harbo Award* which would be presented to those retired members who made exceptional contributions to NEA-Alaska/Retired. Rod worked tirelessly and effectively to protect the rights of educators and to maintain quality healthcare. Rod's name is the first one on the plaque which will be displayed at the NEA-Alaska office in Anchorage.

We named the award after Gayle Harbo in recognition of her unparalleled dedication and service to not only retired educators but also all educators in Alaska. Gayle continues in her service as a member of the NEA-Alaska Board of Directors and as such is a member of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board.

— Barbara Stek



Rod's family, Gayle Harbo, Rich Kronberg

Calendar of Events

March

2	Read Across America Day
11	Daylight Savings Time Begins
23-25	NEA ESP Conference
29-30	NEA-Alaska Board Meeting

April

17	Legislative Session Ends
20-22	Spring Conference

May

7-11	National Teacher Appreciation Week
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June

29-30	NEA-Alaska Offices Closed
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July

1-8	NEA RA
1-10	NEA-Alaska Offices Closed